



The Center City District and the Philadelphia Police Department have partnered to establish *Alert Philadelphia*, an emergency communications system which provides real-time information to a wide array of law enforcement agencies and local entities, including, among others, officials on the federal, state and local level, as well as federal executives, homeland security and terrorism advisory councils, businesses, major employers, high-rise office buildings, hospitals, hotels, schools, cultural institutions and private security firms among other sectors.

The genesis of this effort stemmed from a program developed between the Center City District and the Philadelphia Police Department after 9/11. On that day Philadelphians, like many other Americans were watching the traumatic and tragic events in New York City and Washington, DC unfold and were seeking information as they sought to evacuate their downtown area. But city right-of-ways quickly became overcrowded and clogged with massive flows of outbound vehicular traffic and pedestrians streaming back to the safety of their homes and families. At that time, the police department had no effective way of quickly communicating directly to such a large population of citizens' in transit.

To respond to this need Center City District and the Philadelphia Police Department invested in a text-based messaging system that could communicate effectively via e-mail, cell phones, pagers, Blackberry's and PDA's.

Today, *Alert Philadelphia* can reach users in real-time via text messages with critical information on homeland security advisories, crime alerts, bank robberies, amber alerts, major fires or traffic detours, bomb threats, demonstrations, appeals for information, etc. When an incident or emergency occurs, users are instantly notified through the *Alert Philadelphia* network. This system is a personal connection to real-time updates, instructions on where to go, what to do -- or not to do-- who to contact and other important information.

Alert Philadelphia is both a crime fighting tool and an example of innovative public - private partnerships.

Other uses of the system have included:

- To inform the private sector of new security measures put in place nationally and locally following the Madrid and London transit bombings by the FBI, Department of Homeland Security, and the Philadelphia Police, SEPTA & DRPA Transit Police Departments.
- As point of distribution and source of surveillance photos and a composite sketch of a suspect in a high profile crime seen fleeing from the scene of an early morning shooting, and to request that businesses preserve their CCTV surveillance footage for the subsequent investigation. The result led to the suspect's apprehension and eventual conviction.
- Regular notification of demonstrations, protests and marches in the City Center area.



- The system is also used to notify police, fire and surrounding buildings of planned evacuation drills; to ensure successful and safe drills, and as a tool to distinguish between drills and actual emergencies.
- To inform businesses to the theft of a UPS uniform and keypad with an advisory to check all UPS delivery personnel's identification. The uniform and keypad were used to commit a subsequent robbery outside of the downtown.
- The Philadelphia Police Department's Homeland Security, Special Victims and Homicide Unit's have also relied on the system to notify and solicit assistance from the private sector in several different high profile cases.
- The Alert Philadelphia system is used regularly to provide information regarding ongoing crime patterns or special crime alerts to inform, educate and seek information on behalf of federal, state or local law enforcement.
- Distribution of a Department of Public Health advisory to restaurants, hotels and major hospitality venues regarding a Norovirus outbreak.
- The system has also been tested during various local, state and federal counter terrorism field exercises.
- The system also served as a critical communications tool during an underground transformer fire in the heart of Center City which impacted thousands of workers, shoppers and businesses, and re-routed traffic over a three-hour period.
- The system has been credited with aiding the Philadelphia Police Department with four arrests, a restaurant scam artist, a hotel con artist and brass standpipe thief. An alert was sent out notifying users of an ingenious office thief engaged in stealing laptops from downtown office buildings. Armed with good surveillance photos, police were able to make an arrest of a suspect *within 24 hours* of first notification after the man was spotted by an alerted security officer.
- In addition, communications were sent via the Alert with preparations and real-time updates during the Philadelphia Phillies World Series Championship Parade and information was distributed in preparation for a Philadelphia Eagles celebration.

For more information on *Alert Philadelphia* please contact Stacy Irving, Senior Director, Crime Prevention Services at the Center City District at (215) 440-5525 or via email @ sirving@centercityphila.org